

INFORMATION SHEETS

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Jeff Koons

May 13 to September 2, 2012

FONDATION **BEYELER**

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ATTENTION: Please do not touch the works of art!
Extremely fragile paintings and sculptures are exhibited
here. We kindly request you not to touch the works under
any circumstances.



This symbol in the exhibition refers to works discussed
below. Please note the number and symbol on the exhibit
labels and the corresponding number in the text.

INTRODUCTION

The Fondation Beyeler is presenting the first exhibition ever devoted by a Swiss museum to the American artist Jeff Koons (b. 1955). Koons, likely the best-known living artist, has for decades been causing a furore with the combination of popular and high culture that informs his art.

Our extensive presentation focuses on three central series of works – *The New*, *Banalities* and *Celebration* – which represent crucial stages in Koons's development and lead to the nucleus of his thinking and creative activity. *The New* comprises the ready-made-like cleaning appliances of his early period, symbols of newness and purity. *Banalities* includes those traditionally crafted sculptures in porcelain and wood which have since become (post-)modern icons. Finally, the *Celebration* series, on which Koons has been working for almost twenty years, features high-gloss steel sculptures of unique material perfection, and large-format paintings in which the artist celebrates childhood in a veritably baroque way.

Koons's equally spectacular and subtle works are repeatedly concerned with themes such as innocence, beauty, sexuality and happiness. These reflect his conception of an art that is accessible to every viewer.

In parallel with the exhibition, two Koons outdoor sculptures will be on view in the park of the Fondation Beyeler. One, *Balloon Flower (Blue)*, installed in the North Pond, demonstrates the artist's mastery of material illusion. The other, *Split-Rocker*, a monumental floral sculpture composed of thousands of real plants, establishes an unprecedented dialogue between art and nature.

ROOM 1 THE NEW

About the series *The New*

From early on in his career, Jeff Koons has created his works in closed series to which he has given their own titles. The first series that he planned as such from the start is entitled *The New*. Koons conceived the works in this series between 1980 and 1982, although their production continued until 1987. The first room in the exhibition is entirely dedicated to this early series, which occupies a crucial place in Koons's artistic development.

1 • *The New Jeff Koons*, 1980

The exhibition opens with the programmatic work *The New Jeff Koons*. This work consists of a light box containing a black and white photograph that shows the artist as a child posing self-confidently at a desk, with crayons and a colouring book in front of him. In this work, Koons celebrates the child not just as the source of creativity but also as a symbol of integrity, innocence and purity. These central ideas in *The New* series constitute the key themes of Koons's art.

2 • *New Hoover Quik-Broom, New Hoover Celebrity IV; New Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polishers; The New; New Hoover Celebrity IIIs*, 1980

Works in which Koons uses new, unused vacuum cleaners and shampoo polishers are particularly characteristic of the series *The New*. As early as 1980, his first vacuum cleaner objects were exhibited as a window installation in the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. For the present show, this display has been reconstructed using the originals. They include three works with suspended vacuum cleaners and shampoo polishers as well as a light box with the caption "The New", which alludes to the New Museum while also having given the series its name. "Newness" provides the conceptual foundation for the entire series. From an art historical viewpoint, Koons's cleaning appliances belong to the tradition of the ready-made, which Marcel Duchamp introduced into art in the early 20th century when he elevated mundane *objets trouvés* to the status of works of art.

ROOM 1 THE NEW

3 • *New Hoover Convertibles, Green, Red, Brown, New Shelton Wet/Dry 10 Gallon Displaced Doubledecker*, 1981–1987

The series entitled *The New* is dominated by brand new cleaning appliances which are displayed lying or standing on fluorescent lights in cube-shaped Plexiglas showcases. The showcases, which are presented singly or stacked on top of another, vary in size according to the number, type and positioning of the vacuum cleaners and/or shampoo polishers. Through the severity of their presentation and the use of neon tubes, these works evoke the reductive clarity of Minimal Art. As objects, Koons's explicitly unused and therefore immaculate cleaning appliances embody "ideal newness", standing for eternity and purity, like the portrait of the young artist in *The New Jeff Koons* (no. 1).

4 • *New Shelton Wet/Drys Tripledecker*, 1981

Although his cleaning appliances were originally created as functional commercial objects, Koons does not simply present them as lifeless goods in coffin-like showcases. Instead he endows them with a kind of biological, living quality, seeing them as "breathing machines". Inspired by the forms of the tubes and apertures, Koons also highlights the bisexual characteristics of the cleaning appliances, through which they in turn become a metaphor for original intactness. In Koons's work, the cleaning appliances also symbolise the ideal of the reconciliation of opposites, as is emphasised by the model description "Wet/Dry" that features on some appliances' casing and that is also included in the title of certain works.

ROOM 1 THE NEW

5 • *New! New Too!*, 1983

Within *The New*, the celebration of newness is expressed not only through the cleaning appliance works but also through the large-format lithograph entitled *New! New Too!*, which is mounted on cotton. By taking a pre-existent advertising poster for a newly launched alcoholic beverage as his point of departure, Koons demonstrates his specific interest in commercial images and pictorial strategies. In keeping with their original function, these "posters", together with the objects in showcases, were intended to directly communicate the series' basic content to viewers. Koons's fascination with the manipulative potential of images and his aspiration to make artworks as accessible as possible for viewers are manifested in this. As a picture on canvas, *New! New Too!* is also an early testimony to Koons's preoccupation with monumental painting, which was only to be fully developed years later with the series entitled *Celebration* (Rooms 5, 6, 7 and 8).

ROOMS 2, 3 AND 4 *BANALITY*

About the series *Banality*

In 1988 Koons created his groundbreaking series entitled *Banality*, which was exhibited simultaneously in galleries in Cologne, New York and Chicago. In contrast to the series *The New*, in which he had still worked with minimalistically staged objects, he finally switched over to sculpture in *Banality*, while tending to orient his work more towards a baroque popular aesthetic. With his much-remarked *Banality* series, Koons not only placed the concept of art on a new foundation but finally also became a star on the international art scene. As a series, *Banality* consists of twenty sculptural figures of which every last detail was conceived by the artist. In an edition consisting of three unique versions and an artist's proof, Koons had his sculptures created by professional artisans who signed each work very visibly with their name, while his signature was placed beneath the sculpture. As a group, the *Banality* figures form an extensive panorama in which Koons's artistic programme finds its expression: "In *Banality*, I was trying to tell people to have a sense of security in their own past, to embrace their own past. This was the most direct way that I started to speak about people not letting art be a segregator."

ROOM 2 *BANALITY*

6 • *Ushering in Banality*, 1988

The key idea of the *Banality* series – that apparent banality can induce self-acceptance in viewers – finds particularly clear expression in the seminal polychrome wooden sculpture *Ushering in Banality*. As the work's title indicates, a pig is being "ushered" into banality by two cherubs and a small boy, while itself becoming a symbol for the "banality" into which the observer is ushered. In his work, Koons not only gives the concept of banality a positive twist, but even elevates it to a fundamental artistic ideal. It is far from coincidental that the artist has identified himself with the red-clad boy behind the pig, who stands for the complicity between men and animals that typifies many of the works in the *Banality* series. With *Ushering in Banality*, as with the *The New Jeff Koons* (no. 1), it is the artist as a child who points the way.

ROOM 2 *BANALITY*

7 • *Popples*, 1988

Several figures in the *Banality* series, among them *Popples*, are derived from doll-like children's toys. As an endearing cuddly toy, *Popples* evokes the innocence of childhood but the fact that it is a doll made of rigid porcelain also gives it a monstrous quality. This game with the reconciliation of opposites also expresses itself in the materiality of the object, which looks soft but which is in fact hard. Through its material transformation and its elevation on a base, *Popples* stands for the dissolution of aesthetic categories like "art" and "kitsch" that characterises the whole of Koons's oeuvre. The use of porcelain, which has evolved in the course of its history from a luxury good destined for princes to a product used daily by the bourgeoisie, gives tangible expression to the "democratisation" of art.

ROOM 3 *BANALITY*

8 • *Buster Keaton*, 1988

In his works, Koons repeatedly alludes to images drawn from art history, which he transfers to figures in popular culture. The wooden sculpture *Buster Keaton* can accordingly be seen as a contemporary version of Christ astride the donkey he rode on Palm Sunday, which was a widespread motif in medieval art. In its tragicomic appearance, this sculpture of the star of the silent screen expresses the constant alternation between light-heartedness and seriousness that characterises much of Koons's work. Like many traditional figures of saints, Koons's *Buster Keaton* is made of wood: "When I work with wood it is so that people can feel the security of religion." The materials chosen by Koons in fact always correspond to an emotional need.

ROOM 3 BANALITY

9 • *Christ and the Lamb*, 1988

The ornate mirror work *Christ and the Lamb* is a highly sophisticated visual puzzle at first suggested only by its title. The figure of the infant Jesus playing with the lamb from Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne*, now in the Louvre in Paris, is concealed in the contours of the gilt Rococo frame. Through the play of reflections, viewers see their image superimposed on the body of the infant Jesus, thereby themselves acquiring a sacred quality. Koons's fundamental concept of an art that can elevate its viewers is thus achieved through the medium of the work itself, which in this case is object, sculpture and "painting" all at once.

10 • *Naked*, 1988

In many figures of the *Banalities* series, Koons addresses the problem of guilt and exoneration, one of the central questions of human existence. In the porcelain sculpture *Naked*, a boy and girl stand in the nude on a pink heart adorned with brightly coloured flowers, with one arm on each other's shoulder. The boy is holding out a bunch of flowers to the girl, but it is not clear whether she is paying more attention to the anthurium's phallic pistil or to the boy's still undeveloped genitals. *Naked* therefore plays on the traditional representation of Adam and Eve at the time of their fall from grace, while still maintaining the state of original innocence in which the two children find themselves. Many other *Banalities* figures are based on a combination of purity and sexuality already thematised in Koons's vacuum cleaner works from *The New* series.

ROOM 4 BANALITY

11 • *Pink Panther*, 1988

Like *Woman in Tub* shown in the preceding room, the porcelain figure *Pink Panther*, which is reminiscent of a pin-up girl, belongs to those works which Koons, as he himself has put it, based on the motif of "masturbation as a metaphor for cultural guilt and shame". The artist tries to liberate viewers from such feelings of guilt and shame by challenging them to stand up for their suppressed aesthetic preferences. *Pink Panther* is also a particularly vivid expression of the formal and compositional interest of Koons's approach to sculpture. With its charged erotic relationship between woman and animal, *Pink Panther* is particularly striking because of the multiple viewpoints from which we can see its dynamically twisted figure, a feature derived from the Mannerist tradition of the "figura serpentinata".

ROOM 4 BANALITY

12 • *Stacked*, 1988

In this painted wooden sculpture, a pig, a goat, two dogs and a bird are "stacked" on top of one another in a tower-like construction. The work's structure can therefore be compared with the cleaning appliances piled up in showcases in Koons's earlier series *The New*, which are presented in the first room of the exhibition. Carved by traditional craftsmen, the work *Stacked* can be seen as a new interpretation of the figures in the tale "The Town Musicians of Bremen" and is thus a good example of how Koons frequently refers to European folk art, which corresponds to his desire for an art accessible to all.

13 • *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, 1988

Jeff Koons's legendary porcelain work *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, described by him as a contemporary "Pietà", has today itself become a post-modern icon. The superstar who has been exalted to a monument is shown posing in the work, surrounded by golden roses, heroically like a modern Orpheus. His chimpanzee Bubbles is resting on his lap, looking as artificial as its human counterpart. In his ambivalence, Michael Jackson stands for the elimination of sexual, ethnic, aesthetic and social distinctions in one person, thereby corresponding to Koons's ideal of an "anti-discriminatory" art reconciling all opposites, through which he attempts to reach the largest possible audience.

14 • *Wishing Well*, 1988

By using mirror glass, Koons resorts to a material that directly involves viewers in the work because of its reflective quality. The incorporation of a mirror therefore also corresponds to Koons's fundamental view that art should be accessible to all. His belief that an artwork should reveal viewers' suppressed yearnings is particularly demonstrated by the mirror work *Wishing Well*. Here, the mirror serves as a means for self-reflection and self-seduction by viewers, who can see and "find" themselves in it.

ROOMS 5, 6, 7 AND 8 CELEBRATION

About the series *Celebration*

Originally conceived as a small project for a calendar, *Celebration* has since developed into Koons's most elaborate series to date. From 1994 onwards, Koons was involved for many years in this massive project, which consists of monumental sculptures made of polyethylene or high chromium stainless steel as well as large-format oil paintings. The history of the creation of *Celebration* is closely tied up with events in Koons's family life, particularly the birth of his son Ludwig Maximilian in 1992. In its character as a feast of the childlike, the *Celebration* series can also be seen as a token of the father's love for the son who was taken away from him.

ROOM 5 CELEBRATION

15 • *Cat on a Clothesline (Aqua)*, 1994–2001

One of the earliest sculptures in the *Celebration* series is *Cat on a Clothesline (Aqua)*, which is made of polyethylene. Like all the *Celebration* sculptures, it was created in an edition of five differently coloured unique versions. Koons's inspiration for *Cat on a Clothesline* came from a photograph of a kitten hanging in a sock that he had used shortly before for another art project. In *Cat on a Clothesline*, the cat is pegged on a washing line between two enormous flowers, looking out in a somewhat puzzled way from a turquoise sock. Among other things, this droll representation evokes a crucifixion motif, thereby once again embedding Koons's work in the Christian iconographical tradition.

ROOM 6 CELEBRATION

16 • *Play-Doh*, 1995–2007

With the *Celebration* series, Koons accomplishes the actual transition to painting, which is placed on an equal footing with sculpture for the first time in his career. Most of the large-format *Celebration* paintings, including the masterly *Play-Doh*, are based on the same basic compositional principle: the central pictorial subject is displayed in front of draped glossy foil, in which individual parts of the object, generally distorted, are seductively reflected many times over. The *Celebration* paintings are inspired by actual arrangements of objects assembled by the artist himself. These motifs are subsequently photographed and reworked before being carefully transferred to the canvas in a significantly enlarged format. Aesthetically, the paintings catch the eye due to their "objective" or even hyper-realistic impact, although the canvas, following the principle of "painting by numbers", is divided into colour fields that are rigorously separated from each other. In *Play-Doh*, Koons transforms a motif taken from childhood into a powerful, sensuous spectacle in which the repeatedly reflected figure seems to dissolve into an almost abstract colour composition.

17 • *Party Hat*, 1995–1997; *Cake*, 1995–1997

In the *Celebration* series, most of the motifs relate to children's festivities such as birthday parties. This is also true of the colourful cardboard hat in *Party Hat* and the decorated slice of cream cake in *Cake*, through which Koons pays tribute to childhood in general, thereby carrying on from the subject matter of the two earlier series shown in this exhibition, *The New* and *Banality*. In their compositional simplicity and visual directness, these paintings seem to be no more than memorably eye-catching, but closer examination shows that their "inner" structure is highly complex and differentiated. Stylistically, the paintings in the *Celebration* series represent a synthesis of the minimalist aesthetic of *The New* and the baroque opulence of *Banality*.

ROOM 6 CELEBRATION

18 • *Hanging Heart (Gold/Magenta)*, 1994–2006;
***Cracked Egg (Blue)*, 1994–2006**

The works in the *Celebration* series emphasise familiar decorative items that, through material transformation and rescaling, are elevated to monumental sculptures made of high chromium stainless steel. These items include gift articles for Christmas and St. Valentine's Day, such as that which inspired the extremely symbolic work *Hanging Heart*. Other subjects in this series can be linked with different highpoints in the holiday calendar, for example *Cracked Egg* with Easter. In their symbolism, these motifs often evoke timeless themes like love, life and transience.

ROOM 7 CELEBRATION

19 • *Balloon Dog (Red)*, 1994–2000

Air-filled objects have interested Koons from the beginning of his career, as is demonstrated by his use of vacuum cleaners in his early work. Numerous works in the *Celebration* series are inspired by the balloon figures modelled by street clowns. In *Balloon Dog (Red)*, for example, Koons transforms a delicate, transient balloon dog into a huge archetypal dog made of durable stainless steel that Koons himself describes as a "Trojan horse". In its perfect execution, *Balloon Dog (Red)* is remarkable for the illusionism of its material – the sculpture looks soft and lightweight but is actually hard and weighs several tons.

ROOM 7 CELEBRATION

20 • *Tulips*, 1995–2004; *Balloon Flower (Blue)*, 1995–2000
(installed in the pond outside the exhibition room)

Flowers are a leitmotiv in Koons's art – a traditional symbol of beauty, life and transience. The artist adds an erotic dimension that is typical of him. This is true of the virtuoso stainless steel sculptures seen here: *Tulips*, installed in this room, and *Balloon Flower (Blue)*, which you will notice when you look out of the window. The simple but ambivalent forms of the flowers contain both male and female characteristics. An idea already thematised by the vacuum cleaners in *The New* and by a number of the *Banalities* figures is therefore once again expressed here. The surrounding space and the viewer are reflected in the immaculate, seductively shiny surfaces of *Tulips* and *Balloon Flower (Blue)*, thus entering into a direct relationship with the work of art. *Balloon Flower (Blue)* seems to be swimming on the surface of the water, achieving a wonderfully weightless effect in the setting of the pond.

21 • *Tulips*, 1995–1998

Placing the sculptural and the painted version of *Tulips* side by side gives very visible expression to the specific and remarkable interaction between painting and sculpture characteristic of Koons's *Celebration* series. This interaction is also demonstrated inside the work of art itself: the object in the *Tulips* painting is reproduced many times over through the multiple reflections in the background. Koons thereby highlights the painted object's sculptural quality, just as he accentuates the painterly dimension of his *Tulips* sculpture by emphasising colour and surface. What we encounter here is therefore a remarkable interplay between the genres of object art, sculpture and painting.

ROOM 8 CELEBRATION

22 • *Donkey*, 1996–1999

Donkey and *Shelter* (no. 23), the large-format paintings shown in this room, are some of the last in the *Celebration* series. In both of them, Koons abandons glossy foil for the picture's background, instead using a large number of different pictorial elements that he combines in a kind of collage. Both paintings feature various toy figures that dominate the pictorial composition. In *Donkey*, we see a cute donkey with yellow gym shoes in front of a collection of toy objects that extend over the entire canvas. To the right we see a selection of different tails – an invitation to us to pick the appropriate tail for the donkey. We thereby become a child-like player and the work transmits the yearnings of childhood.

23 • *Shelter*, 1996–1998

Like *Donkey* (no. 22), *Shelter* can also be interpreted as a surface for projecting childhood desires. Amidst the brightly coloured accumulation of laughing toy figures shown before a range of mountains, we also find the two figures – the green dinosaur's head on the left and the yellow pony's head on the right – whose half-faces provide the motif for the monumental flower sculpture *Split-Rocker* in the park of the Fondation Beyeler.

ROOM 9 Works realised after CELEBRATION

24 • *Elephant*, 2003

The three stainless steel sculptures exhibited in this last room are figures that were created after the *Celebration* series. As if they were two sentries, the comic-like figures *Elephant* and *Titi* stand at the entrance watching over the proud, dominant *Balloon Swan (Magenta)* (no. 25) in the middle of the room. In comparison to the *Balloon Swan (Magenta)*, the little *Elephant* at first seems to be delicate and cute, but its contours also simultaneously suggest a powerful being, whose ears turn into muscular arms. In this work, once again, Koons reflects on the diverse nature of form.

25 • *Balloon Swan (Magenta)*, 2004–2011

Balloon Swan (Magenta), which was completed only recently and which is being exhibited for the very first time, is a sculpture created in the formal idiom of the *Celebration* series, while also pointing into the future. The swan with its raised head is enthroned majestically before us, capturing our entire attention by its elegant physical presence: the toy has turned into a cult figure.

FLORAL SCULPTURE IN THE PARK

Split-Rocker, 2000–2012

Split-Rocker, a colossal floral sculpture comprising thousands and thousands of real plants, will be on view in the park of the Fondation Beyeler. The sculpture continues the compelling dialogue between art and nature that has become so characteristic of the Fondation Beyeler. *Split-Rocker* was first installed in 2000, in the cloister of the Palais des Papes in Avignon, then again a few years later in the gardens of Versailles (2008). Now *Split-Rocker* has begun to flourish in Riehen.

For his floral sculpture, Koons proceeded from two different rocker motifs, a pony and a dinosaur, whose heads he cut in half and then reassembled. Since the halves do not coincide, gaps are formed at certain places which open the sculpture out and transform it into a structure that offers refuge. A disassembled and differently reassembled figure that simultaneously looks forward and to the side, *Split-Rocker* relates to the Cubism of Picasso while at the same time turning it in an entirely new direction. As an outdoor floral sculpture, the piece also continues the tradition of Baroque garden art and the topiary gardening still seen today in popular amusement parks.

With the combination of pony and dinosaur, *Split-Rocker* embodies that confrontation of opposites that is also expressed in the notion of a “monstrous”, gigantic children’s toy. Yet the artist chooses transitory flowers, of all things, as the material for a monument that promises duration. It is not least in this special interplay of supposed opposites that the true tension and force of Koons’s art lie.



Jeff Koons, 2012

Photo: Chris Fanning

BIOGRAPHY OF JEFF KOONS

1955

Jeff Koons is born in York, Pennsylvania, where he spends his childhood.

1972–76

Studies art and design at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. In 1975 he spends an exchange year at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The following year he leaves Chicago for New York.

1977

Koons works at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, acquiring new museum members. Until 1979 he develops his first series of works, consisting of combined ready-mades in which inflatable figures are placed on and in front of mirrors.

1979

Begins to work with household appliances, which he affixes to fluorescent lamps for a series later titled *Pre-New*. Executes first work with a vacuum cleaner. Koons is employed as a broker on Wall Street in order to finance the production of his art.

1980

Koons installs his first show in the display window of the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, out of which he will develop the series *The New*.

1983

Sketches the first water tanks for the *Equilibrium* series.

1985

Koons has his first true one-person show, at the gallery International With Monument, New York.

1986

The series *Luxury and Degradation* and *Statuary* emerge, all of the sculptures of which consist of stainless chrome steel.

1987

Koons is invited to "Skulptur Projekte Münster" in Germany, and creates *Kiepenkerl* in stainless chrome steel.

1988

Koons's new series, *Banalities*, is simultaneously shown in three distinguished galleries in Cologne, New York and Chicago. The porcelain and wood figures mystify the critics.

1991

The *Made in Heaven* series is shown in Cologne and New York. The works, showing the artist making love with Ilona Staller, alias Cicciolina, are largely panned by the critics. Koons and Staller marry.

1992

Koons creates the monumental floral sculpture *Puppy* in front of the castle in Bad Arolsen near Kassel. Large museum retrospectives are held in Amsterdam, Stuttgart, San Francisco, and Minneapolis.

1993

Inspired by his little son, Ludwig Maximilian, Koons develops the extensive series *Celebration*, comprising colored chrome steel and polyethylene sculptures and paintings. Koons separates from Ilona Staller, and a protracted struggle for custody of their son begins.

1999

Koons begins a new series, *Easyfun*, comprising paintings and wall-mounted sculptures.

2000

Designs *Split-Rocker*, his second floral sculpture, which is first shown at the Palais des Papes in Avignon. He begins a new series of paintings, *Easyfun-Ethereal*.

2002

A new series of sculptures and paintings, *Popeye*, is commenced. Koons weds Justine Wheeler.

2004

Koons is honored with retrospectives in New York, Oslo and Helsinki.

2006

Begins working on a new series, *Hulk Elvis*.

2008

Large-scale exhibitions in Chicago, New York, Berlin, and in the Palace of Versailles, are devoted to Koons. He starts working on the new series *Antiquity*.

2012

The Fondation Beyeler stages the first exhibition of Koons's work ever held in a Swiss museum, soon to be followed by a Koons exhibition in Frankfurt am Main.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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We look forward to hearing your feedback at
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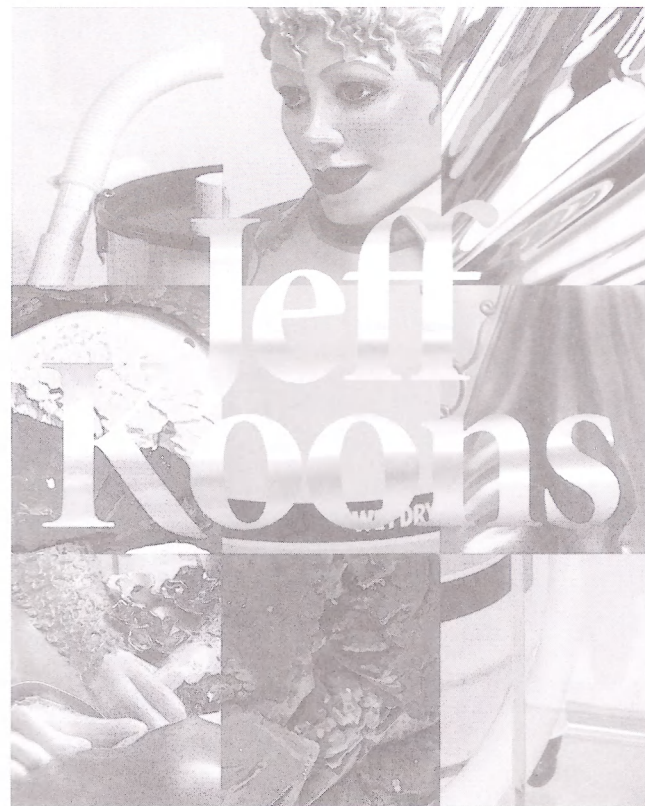
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CATALOGUE



JEFF KOONS

Exhibition catalogue, published by Hatje Cantz
212 pages, 80 illustrations, CHF 68,-

With a conversation between Jeff Koons and Theodora Vischer
as well as essays by Raphaël Bouvier and Günther Vogt.